

NATIONAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (NIMS) INCIDENT/UNIFIED COMMAND OVERVIEW

NIMS is a system mandated by Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 that provides a consistent nationwide approach for federal, state, local and tribal governments, as well as the private-sector and nongovernmental organizations to work effectively and efficiently together to prepare for, respond to, and recover from domestic incidents, regardless of cause, size or complexity. NIMS includes a core set of concepts, principles, and terminology. HSPD-5 identifies these as the ICS; multi-agency coordination systems; training; identification and management of resources (including systems for classifying types of resources); qualification and certification; and the collection, tracking, and reporting of incident information and incident resources.

NIMS builds on the long-used Incident Command System and the proven principles of unified command. Another key feature of NIMS includes communication and information management so that responders and managers across all agencies, professions and jurisdictions have a common operating picture for a more efficient and effective response.

The Incident Command System (ICS) is a widely used and understood emergency management tool. It is used by local, state, and federal agencies and the military. Although originally developed to manage multi-agency response to wild land fires, it long ago evolved into an all risk system.

Use of the ICS for hazardous materials incidents is required by the Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act (EPCRA), Occupational Safety and Health Administration rules, and the National Fire Protection Association. It has been adopted by the National Fire Academy as the model system for the fire service. It is also the policy of the State of Idaho that the Incident Command System will be used in response to hazardous materials incidents.

The Incident Command System is suitable for use regardless of the number or variety of jurisdictions and agencies involved in a response. It provides an organizational structure that is adaptable to any incident, and is acceptable to users throughout a community, state, or region. It is a flexible and responsive system, which is capable of orderly expansion to a Unified Command if a simple initial response escalates into a major emergency.

All functional units report to and are guided by Incident Command. The Incident Command function may be conducted in two ways; single command or unified command. The single command option gives one individual the authority for overall management of the incident. This is appropriate when only one agency or jurisdiction is involved in the response. When an incident crosses jurisdictional boundaries or when response from numerous agencies is required, a unified command system may be established. This requires several agencies jointly to determine objectives, strategy, and priorities.

To ensure coordination during a significant incident, the State of Idaho will provide a State On-Scene-Coordinator (SOSC). The SOSC will facilitate the formation of a unified command during a significant incident. Under Unified Command, the Idaho SOSC can assist by acquiring resources, advising on response issues, and coaching the jurisdiction in overall scene management. The SOSC will coordinate with responding state agencies and be the principal state spokesperson in the unified command as an advocate for all state interests. In this role, the SOSC effectively represents the interests of the state of Idaho and its citizens. The Idaho SOSC will be appointed by the Idaho Adjutant General, Chief of the Bureau of Homeland Security.

Incident Command, along with command staff, must prepare objectives, approve an action plan, and approve all requests for ordering and releasing of primary resources. Incident Command must develop a responsive organization to ensure effective incident management. That organization may be simple, or may grow increasingly complex as the incident grows.

The organization's staff builds from the top down with the responsibility and performance placed initially with the Incident Commander. As the need exists, functional units can be developed each with several possible sub- units. The specific structure established for any given incident will depend on the management needs of the incident based on its size, complexity, location, number of agencies involved, and a host of other factors.

As the emergency response needs of a hazardous materials/WMD incident are met, it is the responsibility of Incident Command to demobilize resources and revise the emergency response organization to meet the nature of the remaining response activities. Incident Command, in consultation with the Bureau of Homeland Security will be responsible for determining when emergency conditions no longer exist. Incident Command will develop an orderly process to transition remediation/recovery management responsibilities to the appropriate local, state and federal agencies, as well as responsible private parties.